(b) if so, whether both India and Australia are seen as important components of stability in the Asia-Pacific region; and

(c) if so, what are the main issues on which both India and Australia have agreed to have a closer cooperation?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) Yes.

(b) Yes.

(c) India and Australia have agreed to seek closer cooperation on political, strategic, economic and commercial issues at the bilateral, regional and international levels.

Pakistani National as Visa Officer in British High Commission

2646. SHRI P. PRABHAKAR REDDY: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether the British High Commission in New Delhi has appointed a former Pakistani National as a Visa Officer in High Commission's office;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) Government's reaction thereto and whether Government have conveyed its feelings to the British Government on the proposed appointment; and

(d) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) No.

(b) to (d) Do not arise.

Increase in staff strength in Indian and Pakistani High Commissions

2647. SHRI LALIT SURI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether in view of the resumption of diplomatic relations between India and Pakistan, the staff strength in the two High Commissions is proposed to be brought to the original level;

(b) if so, by when; and

(c) by when the resumption of trade between the two countries and the issuing of visas for tourists is likely to begin?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) and (b) Following Prime Minister's initiative in April, extending once again the hand of friendship to Pakistan, Government have adopted a step-by-step approach to normalize diplomatic and other links between the two countries. Both countries have appointed High Commissioners and the Delhi-Lahore has been resumed with effect from July 11, Technical level discussion for resumption of civil aviation is scheduled for August 27-28, 2003. There have also been important exchanges in the context of business, cultural and people to people contacts. India would move ahead in a step-by-step manner building on the successes achieved and the confidence generated.

(c) There has been no restriction on trade with Pakistan although Pakistan continues to be highly restrictive in its trade with India, and does not grant MFN status. Pakistanis are issued visitor visa to visit India and there has been no restriction on issue of visas to Pakistani nationals who are found eligible, and visas are normaly granted after pre-verification.

Death of Indian Officers

†2648. PROF. R.B.S. VARMA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) the details of officials working in the Ministry of External Affairs who had died in harness while posted abroad;

(b) whether Government have provided jobs to the dependents of the deceased on compassionate grounds;

(c) if so, the number of such dependents who have been provided jobs on compassionate grounds;

(d) the number of applications for compassionate grounds pending for the approval of Government; and

(e) whether Government holds positive views on such applications?

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.